

Academic Use of the Natural Area Teaching Lab (NATL) Results of 2008 Faculty Survey

By: Erica Van Etten
NATL graduate TA, Fall 2008

Background

In 2000, the Natural Area Advisory Committee conducted a survey of academic users of NATL to assess current and projected uses, and to solicit suggestions from faculty for improvements to NATL infrastructure. In the past 8 years many improvements have been made to NATL, including the construction of an academic pavilion (2000), creation of Natural Area Park (2003), addition of the 11-acre NATL-east (2005), construction of self-guided nature trails & informational kiosks (2007), and construction of the SEEP boardwalk trail (2008). This 2008 survey follows up on the 2000 survey to determine how many faculty members and courses are currently using NATL, and what additional improvements might be made.

Methods

In the fall semester of 2008, a survey (Appendix 2) was emailed to members of 9 departments and schools by the NATL graduate TA. All faculty teaching the 76 courses listed in the 2000 survey were contacted, as well as additional people recommended by members of the Natural Area Advisory Committee (NAAC). Faculty were asked how they use NATL for courses, and to provide feedback on how NATL could be improved for their use. This document summarizes the results of over 50 returned surveys.

Use of NATL for courses

Thirty faculty members from 9 departments and schools identified 36 courses that are currently using NATL for teaching. More than 1100 undergraduate and graduate students in these courses use NATL each year, as calculated from how often the course is offered and the approximate number of students per offering.

Table 1. Use of Natural Area Teaching Laboratory by classes (see Appendix 1 for details).

College	Department or School	Courses using NATL	Students taught per year
Agriculture & Life Sciences	Entomology & Nematology	16	505
	Forest Resources & Conservation	4	135
	Plant Pathology	1	5
	Soil & Water Science	1	35
	Wildlife Ecology & Conservation	1	30
Liberal Arts & Sciences	Botany	6	327
	Zoology	4	52
Education	Teaching and Learning	1	24
Engineering	Environmental Engineering Sciences	2	47
SUM		36	1160

¹ of 36 courses using NATL, 26 are offered once a year, 6 are offered every other year, and 4 are offered 2 or more times per year.

² For each course, the estimated number of students per class was multiplied by the number of classes per year, and these products were summed for all courses in the department

How NATL is used by faculty

Almost all of the 30 faculty who responded use NATL facilities for class field trips. A wide range of subjects are taught, including: insect collecting techniques, plant survey methods, measurement of soil respiration, thermoregulatory behavior in lizards, squirrel behavior, and plant-insect relationships. In addition, 9 faculty members in Entomology & Nematology and Botany used NATL as a source of insect and plant material for their courses. For collecting purposes, several people noted an appreciation for the diversity of habitats present in NATL, as well as for the trails & boardwalk that give easy access to each ecosystem. Also mentioned in the survey were the use of NATL for independent student projects, faculty research, workshops, tours and personal recreation.

Table 2. Use of Natural Area Teaching Lab by 30 faculty currently using NATL for courses.

Activity	Number of faculty using NATL for this purpose
Field trips for courses	27
Collection of materials for courses	9
Class projects	3
Research (student & faculty)	5

Suggestions for further improvement

Much appreciation was expressed for NATL by faculty members in the survey short answer questions. Many commented on recent improvements, such as the boardwalk and informational trails & kiosks. Suggestions for further improvements were permanent soil pits (which were also mentioned in the 2000 survey), more displays about SEEP plants & wetland communities, plant lists for different ecosystem types, more prescribed burns (especially those in which students can participate), and an updated bird list.

Appendix 1. Courses using NATL

Course #	Course Name	Fall	Spring	Summer	# times taught per year	Average number students	Times taught x number students	Contact Person
ALS 2931	Thermal Biology	1			1	15	15	"Dan Hahn" <dahahn@ufl.edu>
BOT 2710	Practical Plant Taxonomy	1			1	55	55	"Judd, Walter" <wjudd@flmnh.ufl.edu>
BOT 3153	Local Flora	1	1	1	3	24	72	"Corogin, Paul" <treestone@atlantic.net>
BOT 3601	Plant Ecology		1		1	50	50	"Putz, Francis" <fep@botany.ufl.edu>
BOT 5725	Taxonomy of Vascular Plants		1		1	20	20	"Judd, Walter" <wjudd@flmnh.ufl.edu>
EES 4102L	Environmental Biology Lab		1		1	35	35	"Brown, Mark" <mtb@ufl.edu> responded by Sean King <sking83@ufl.edu> graduate student and McLaughlin, Daniel <mclaugd@ufl.edu>
EES 6308C	Wetlands Ecology	1			1	12	12	"Reiss, Kelly" <kcr@ufl.edu>
EES 6308C	Wetlands Ecology	1			1	11	11	"Reiss, Kelly" <kcr@ufl.edu>
ENY 3005L	Principles of Entomology	1	1	1	3	120	360	"Lehnert, Matt" <mlehnert@ufl.edu> answered for "McSorley, Robert" <rms@ifas.ufl.edu>, "Barfield, Carl S" <barfield@ufl.edu>, "Baldwin, Rebecca" <baldwinr@ufl.edu>
ENY 3163/5164	Invertebrate Field Biology			1	1	15	15	"Branham, Marc" <MABranham@ifas.ufl.edu>
ENY 3222/5223	Biology & Identification of Urban Pests			1	1	15	15	"Koehler, Phil" <pgk@ifas.ufl.edu>
ENY 4161/6166	Insect Classification		1		1	24	24	"Branham, Marc" <MABranham@ifas.ufl.edu>, "Choate, Paul M" <oskar@ufl.edu>
ENY 4453	Behavioral Ecology & Systematics		1		0.5	15	7.5	"Branham, Marc" <MABranham@ifas.ufl.edu>
ENY 4660L	Medical and Veterinary Entomology Laboratory	1			1	8	8	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
ENY 4905	Forensic Entomology		1		1	3	3	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
ENY 4905	Insect Conservation		1		1	10	10	"Daniels,Jaret C" <jcdlns@ufl.edu>,"
ENY 4905L	Forensic Entomology Laboratory		1		1	2	2	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
ENY 5611	Immature Insects			1	1	10	10	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
ENY 6203	Insect Ecology	1			1	19	19	"Branham, Marc" <MABranham@ifas.ufl.edu>
ENY 6665L	Advanced Medical and Veterinary Entomology Laboratory	1			1	6	6	"McAuslane, Heather" <hjmca@ufl.edu>
ENY 6905	Advanced Forensic Entomology		1		1	1	1	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
ENY 6905L	Advanced Forensic Entomology Laboratory		1		1	1	1	"Kaufman, Phil" <pkaufman@ufl.edu>
FNR 3131	Dendrology/Forest Plants	1			1	50	50	"Long, Alan" <ajl2@ufl.edu>
FNR 3410C	Natural Resource Sampling	1			1	30	30	"Staudhammer,Christina L" <staudham@ufl.edu>
FOR 3153C	Forest Ecology	1			1	35	35	"Jose,Shibu" <sjose@ufl.edu>
FOR 3214	Fire in Natural Resource Management		1		1	20	20	"Long, Alan" <ajl2@ufl.edu>
NEM 5707	Plant Nematology	1			1	8	8	"Dickson, D.W." <dwd@ifas.ufl.edu>
PCB 4044C	Introduction to Ecology	1	1		2	60	120	"Schuur, Ted" <tschuur@ufl.edu>,"
PCB 5695	Ecosystems of Florida		1		0.5	20	10	"Putz, Francis" <fep@botany.ufl.edu>
PLP 3653	Introductory Mycology	1			0.5	10	5	"Kimbrough, James" <jamesk@ufl.edu>
SCE 6290	Science Instruction in Informal Settings			1	1	24	24	"Jones, Linda" <ljones@ufl.edu>
SOS 4244	Wetlands and Water Quality		1		1	35	35	"Clark,Mark W" <clarkmw@ufl.edu>
WEC 4523	Human Dimensions of Natural Resource Conservation	1			1	30	30	"Jacobson, Susan" <jacobsons@wec.ufl.edu>
ZOO 3513	Animal Behavior		1		0.5	30	15	"Brockmann, Jane" <hjb@zoology.ufl.edu>
ZOO 4473	Avian Biology		1		1	28	28	"Levey, Douglas" <dlevey@ufl.edu>,"
ZOO 6506	Ethology		1		0.5	14	7	"Brockmann, Jane" <hjb@zoology.ufl.edu>
ZOO 6927	Independent Study Zoology	1	1		2	1	2	"Levey, Douglas" <dlevey@ufl.edu>,"
TOTAL: 36 courses		16	20	6			1160	students taught per year

Appendix 2: 2008 Faculty Survey (email)

I am the graduate student TA for the Natural Area Teaching Lab this semester. I am writing because I have in my notes that you are using (or have used) NATL for teaching, projects or research.

I have 2 goals for writing. First, we want to know how many faculty and students are currently using NATL. Second, we would like to know how we can improve NATL for increased faculty use. We last conducted a survey of faculty in 2000, and would very much appreciate your feedback!

Please reply to the questions directly into this email and send it back. Also, if you know any new courses or faculty in your department using NATL since our 2000 survey, please include this information and/or forward this email.

I also have a short (5 minute) presentation highlighting the many improvements to NATL in the last 5 years. This could be suitable for presentation at faculty meetings to introduce more people to the resources of NATL. Do you think this would be useful for your department?

Thanks so much,

Erica Van Etten
NATL TA

1. How do you use NATL? (field trip for course, senior projects, workshops, club use, recreation, collection of materials for courses, etc.)

Use of NATL for your course(s):

2. Course name and number:

3. When taught (spring/fall/summer):

4. How often taught (1x/year, 2x/year, every other year):

5. Approximately how many students per offering:

6. How could NATL be improved for your use?

7. Any other comments or suggestions?